

Sexual Violence in Teen Dating Relationships

Sexual Violence is often one of the many forms of abuse committed within teen dating relationships. While all forms of violence are difficult to talk about and disclose, youth can be especially hesitant to discuss sexual abuse. Teens regularly face forms of abuse spanning the continuum of sexual violence, ranging from sexual harassment to sexual assault. As a community, we must address sexual violence, as well as other forms of abuse, to prevent teen dating violence.

Statistics

- ◆ In sexual assaults reported to law enforcement, 67% of female victims and 88% of male victims were under age 18.

Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund; "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report"; National Center for Juvenile Justice: March 2006

- ◆ 15% of females and 6.5% of males under the age of 18 who were raped were raped by an intimate partner.

Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes; "Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey"; National Institute of Justice; November 2000

Forms of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence in a teen dating relationship can take on many forms. An abusive dating partner may do any of the following things;

- ◆ Call you degrading names of a sexual nature
- ◆ Talk constantly about sex when she is around you, even if you ask her to stop
- ◆ Spread sexual rumors about you
- ◆ Touch you in ways that make you uncomfortable
- ◆ Ask you to perform sexual acts with other people as a favor to him or her
- ◆ Use phrases such as, "You would if you really loved me," or "If you don't, I'll just date someone who will," to try to pressure you into having sex with him
- ◆ Constantly try to push you to "the next level" by pressuring you to begin or increase sexual activity
- ◆ Pressure or force you to watch pornography or look at pornographic pictures
- ◆ Try to give you alcohol or drugs to impair your ability to make your own decisions about sexual activity
- ◆ Talk about or make fun of your body
- ◆ Force you to have sexual intercourse

"He would tell me I was a slut, not worth anyone loving me. The terrifying thing is that I believed him."

- 11th grade student from Austin, TX

Preventing Sexual Violence in Dating Relationships

Sexual abuse is an act of violence, and it is never the victim's fault. Every human has ultimate say over their own bodies. No one has the right to take that choice away. Below are some steps that can help prevent sexual violence from occurring in Texas communities.

1. ***Change the environment.*** Too often acts of sexual abuse are not seen as acts of violence. Even worse, the victim is often blamed for the abuse, rather than the abuser. Gender stereotypes and inequalities contribute to the continuation of sexual abuse. Respectfully challenge your peers when they make victim blaming statements such as, "She was asking for it," or when they reinforce gender stereotypes by insisting that, "Men should 'be in charge' in relationships." Talk about teen dating violence and sexual abuse with your family, friends, peers, and community. Learn to be a good bystander and challenge the acceptance and minimizing of sexual violence wherever you see it.

Respectfully challenge your peers when they make victim-blaming statements

2. ***Set your boundaries and communicate clearly.*** Talk early and often about your beliefs regarding sexual activity. Let your dating partner know how you would like to be treated, and make sure you ask how they want to be treated. It is your responsibility to respect your partner's boundaries at all times, and your right to maintain your own boundaries without questioning or justification. Always remember that you and your partner also have the right to change your boundaries.
3. ***Find out about local resources.*** Find out where the nearest rape crisis center is and how you can get in touch with them. Talk to your school counselor about the school's policies for handling dating and sexual violence, including sexual harassment.

It is crucial to most survivors of sexual assault that the first person they tell is supportive.

4. ***Support victims.*** Studies show that students are likely to talk to their friends about dating and sexual violence before they talk to anyone else. If one of your friends discloses sexual abuse or assault to you, listen intently and avoid asking victim-blaming questions such as "Did you try to fight him off?" or "Did you lead her on?". It is crucial to most survivors of sexual assault that the first person they tell is supportive. If not, they may never talk about the assault again, or seek the services they need. Let your friend know about local resources, and offer to support them in their decision to seek help.

"Students are more influenced by their peers than any teacher or authority figure. If I can help influence one person, maybe we can begin a chain reaction and each student may be influenced one by one."

- Students Taking Action for Respect 12th grade student from Big Lake, Texas